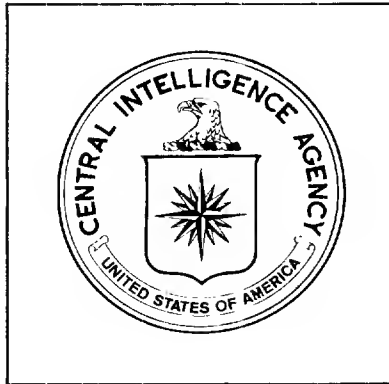


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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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Palestinians

New Commander for the Palestine Liberation Army

Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat and Syrian President Asad apparently have reached agreement on a new commander for the Syrian-based Palestine Liberation Army. According to press reports from Beirut, he is Major General Mahmoud Azzam, formerly deputy commander of the Syrian air force.

Azzam is a Palestinian, but also a Syrian national, a member of the Baath Party of Syria, and a long-time associate of President Asad. His selection will ensure continued effective control of the PLA by the Syrian army. Although the PLA constitutes the bulk of the Palestinians' conventional military forces, it is only theoretically responsive to Arafat's directives.

Arafat has always been unhappy with the extent of Syrian control over the PLA, but he probably thinks it better at this time to accede to the selection of Azzam than to continue his personal and political sparring with the outgoing commander, Musbah Budayri. Budayri recently complained publicly of Arafat's failure to provide sufficient arms and financial support to the PLA. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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India

Turmoil in Nagaland

New Delhi last weekend dissolved the state legislature and imposed direct "president's rule" in long-troubled Nagaland in northeastern India. It had become evident that neither party in the legislature could sustain a stable majority, and New Delhi clearly was uneasy about the political infighting going on in the strategically located state, which shares a border with Burma and is near China.

In state elections last year, the Naga Nationalist Organization, which is backed by Prime Minister Gandhi's Congress Party and had held power since the state's first election in 1964, was narrowly defeated by the United Democratic Front. The Front has strong contacts with rebel tribesmen who, since the mid-1950s, have carried on an intermittent, low-level guerrilla war for the independence of Nagaland. The Front had promised voters it would secure a political settlement with the rebels and bring the insurgency to an end.

Over the past year, however, the party lost its credibility because it was unable to arrange negotiations between New Delhi and the rebels. Recently, a number of independents in the legislature switched allegiance from the Front to the Naga Nationalist Organization, giving that party a majority for a brief period. New Delhi took over when a new round of defections was underway, and the parties started accusing each other of kidnaping or detaining members in order to claim a majority. New Delhi probably will postpone new elections for some time to give the Naga Nationalist Organization a chance to regroup.

In any event, insurgency in Nagaland is likely to remain a problem indefinitely, despite the step-up of Indian army activities last fall in response

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to reports that some rebels were again receiving training in China's Yunnan Province. Several hundred Nagas were trained in China and returned to Nagaland between 1967 and 1972. According to an Indian official, the Indians captured or killed at least 40 China-bound rebels last fall and have intercepted two more groups attempting to exit Nagaland since then.

New Delhi probably intends to continue counter-insurgency operations at about the present level, rather than expand the resources and manpower that a larger effort would entail. In some respects president's rule makes the task easier, but prolonged suspension of elective government will deepen existing contempt for New Delhi throughout Nagaland, and probably revive public sympathy for the rebels, which had been dwindling. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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